

# **Introduction-**

## **Seattle's Role in Regional Water Supply Planning**

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### **Regional Overview**

Seattle Public Utilities' (SPU) role in the region has evolved since the last Water System Plan, from system owner and operator to that of a regional facilitator and provider of multiple services. The utility continues to provide high quality water service to its retail and wholesale customers while expanding its responsibilities as a participant in regional planning and activities.

The Central Puget Sound region, particularly within King, Snohomish and Pierce counties, is experiencing significant growth, and the resulting integration of the network of water delivery systems requires intense coordination. As a result, SPU has reached out to form more complete relationships with its regional counterparts and stakeholders. Issues facing the region cover a broad spectrum including: new Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) regulations, anticipated requirements of the Endangered Species Act, and demands associated with the implementation of the Growth Management Act. SPU's effort to meet the needs of each aspect of these issues requires varying degrees of involvement and participation as a regional leader and partner.

At the forefront of water issues facing the region today is the ability of water suppliers to meet the needs of people and fish. In the aggregate, the region has ample resources to meet these needs. However, the resources are not always accessible or located where and when they are needed. By virtue of partnering and working collaboratively with others, SPU has begun to identify ways to share and balance these resources more efficiently.

SPU's role spans the local, county, sub-regional, and regional levels. Each requires a different degree of regional coordination, partnership and leadership.

### **At the Local Level**

This Water System Plan Update (WSP) details the programs SPU has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, for its retail and wholesale customers. It identifies how the utility operates in a cooperative, coordinated manner to address the ever changing environment of drinking water standards and expectations while maintaining a commitment to protect the source of supply and the environment.

Over the last few decades, population growth in King County has created increased demand for water from Seattle. The largest part of this growth has occurred in the areas served by more than two dozen neighboring cities and special districts known as “purveyors” who buy water wholesale from Seattle.

The supply relationship between SPU and its purveyor community has been governed by long-term contracts. These contracts have provided stability for water pricing and planning in Seattle’s service area. Since the contracts are due to expire in 2012, SPU has entered into active negotiations with its current purveyors, as well as with other potential purveyors, to develop new long-term contracts. SPU anticipates that these contracts will be completed and in place before the expiration date of the current agreements.

*Coordination at the local level occurs on a daily basis in operating the system.*

Essential coordination with SPU’s wholesale customers occurs on a daily basis in operating the system and ensuring high quality drinking water. In planning to meet future water demands, SPU staff works with wholesale customers to prepare the system’s overall demand forecast. In addition, as each wholesale customer updates its individual Water System Plan, SPU coordinates with them so that demand forecasts, transmission needs, conservation and water quality issues are integrated in the Seattle WSP.

SPU has recently exercised leadership in the region by developing the Cedar River Watershed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). This plan has been developed in cooperation with numerous stakeholders and agencies and represents a major regional accomplishment to serve the water needs of people and fish. Its completion outlines the use of the watershed for water supply, while protecting habitat for endangered species.

## **At the County Level**

King County is the land use agency for most of the area served by SPU. For this reason, it is essential that SPU’s water planning efforts be consistent with the County’s land use planning. SPU coordinates with King County staff so that future water demands can be met in accordance with growth projections outlined in the King County Comprehensive Plan (COMPLAN).

In addition to the County’s COMPLAN, King County is interested in the development of a County-wide comprehensive water system plan. In 1998, SPU was asked by King County government to promote and foster a cooperative water supply planning process. SPU has exercised its leadership as the major water provider in the County by facilitating discussions among King County area water providers to promote a useful outcome for all parties. This planning process is designed to result in

consolidated water system plans. This approach would provide an aligned, productive interface between broad regional planning and localized planning efforts of individual water utilities. SPU's WSP, along with system plans of other water utilities in the region, forms the foundation for this planning effort.

King County is also responsible for the treatment of wastewater. In the past this operation has been discrete from drinking water operations, but a link between drinking water and wastewater is becoming more necessary. The County's 1998 Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP) generates a new arena for regional coordination and possible partnering between SPU and the County. In the RWSP, the County identifies the potential for using reclaimed water as a source of supply to offset development of new drinking water sources. SPU participates on the County's Reuse Task Force that intends to develop pilot projects to explore the viability and effectiveness of reused water in the region.

### **At the Sub-Regional Level**

*SPU, Tacoma Public Utilities, Covington Water District and Lakehaven Water District are partnering to develop the Second Supply Project.*

As a result of an increasingly complex regulatory, environmental and political climate, working collaboratively and partnering with groups of local utilities on a sub-regional level is proving to be a more effective way to address short-and long-term water needs in localized areas. Development of Tacoma's Second Supply Project is an example of a sub-regional project in which SPU is partnering to develop potential future sources of supply. This project's partners include: Tacoma Public Utilities, City of Kent, Covington Water District and Lakehaven Water District.

The Snoqualmie Aquifer project is another example of how local utilities within the region are working together to meet future water demands. SPU is partnering with the East King County Regional Water Association to explore the potential for this resource as a future source of supply.

SPU has coordinated with the East and South King County Regional Water Associations as they developed their Coordinated Water System Plans (CWSP), and participated in the planning process for the Skyway CWSP. While each plan has required a different level of involvement, SPU has worked to enhance regional coordination and effectiveness for meeting water needs throughout the region.

### **At the Regional Level**

SPU has forged planning and programmatic relationships with agencies and local governments across county lines to establish larger regional relationships. This effort has resulted in large scale regional assessments

*The Central Puget Sound Water Suppliers' Forum is a significant regional partnering effort.*

and joint ventures with other water suppliers to develop solutions for future generations. While the size and shape of the region varies depending on the situation, SPU's interests remain to work collaboratively to foster long-term relationships and commitments in defining supply problems, stimulating dialogue and facilitating balanced solutions.

SPU is a nationally recognized leader in water conservation programs and accomplishments. Regionally, SPU has a role as a member of the Water Conservation Coalition of Puget Sound (Coalition). The Coalition's membership and programs span the area from Olympia to Bellingham and include the Kitsap Peninsula. In this capacity, SPU participates in conservation programs that provide a consistent message and reach a broad spectrum of the region's population.

The newest, and perhaps the most significant regional partnering effort SPU has undertaken, is the Central Puget Sound Water Suppliers Forum (Forum). This group was formed in 1998 to provide a cooperative planning arena for water suppliers in the King, Pierce, and Snohomish County area. The Forum has taken on the challenge of addressing water issues facing the Central Puget Sound region. Results thus far have produced Phase I of The Central Puget Sound Water Supply Outlook (Outlook), which provides a 20-year demand forecast and an inventory of regional sources of supply and infrastructure within the three county region. SPU will continue its extensive involvement in the second phase of the Outlook, which will compile information related to proposed new sources of supply and alternatives to providing new supply.

Other regional planning efforts are taking place as a result of the listings of Chinook Salmon and Bull Trout as "threatened species" under the Endangered Species Act. In this regard, Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs), also known as watershed basins, are a key geographical basis for planning.

## **Conclusion**

SPU's role and responsibilities in the region will continue to evolve in light of these regional activities, changing regulations and transforming political landscapes. This dynamic environment requires that SPU remain flexible to respond effectively to change. This is true not only in the utility management and operation but also in interfacing with other utilities and government entities.

Seattle has provided regional water supply planning for the utilities that purchase water from Seattle. As these cities and special districts have grown, they have been more involved in planning for the regional water system. SPU's current role with purveyors is characterized more by

partnership and cooperation. This facilitating, cooperative role is a reflection of the complexity of water management in the region, as it becomes increasingly essential to provide stewardship of precious water resources for a wide variety of needs.

This WSP Update does not attempt to duplicate plan elements that are better addressed in the regional planning efforts. Instead, with continued regional efforts as a backdrop, this WSP focuses on management and operation of SPU's water system, and reflects how the numerous efforts within the region may have an impact on operations, facilities and financing.